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Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

Education is not only a fundamental human right, but also a catalyst for the achievement of many other development goals. The present report emphasizes the interlinked nature of all development goals. It provides a brief overview of progress towards the internationally agreed development goals related to education, identifying challenges and possible policy responses and proposing a number of recommendations. In addition to primary education, it considers preschool education, youth and adult literacy and skills development, and gender equality. It examines the quality of education and the relevance of learning gaps across and within countries, as well as teacher shortages and deployment. It highlights measures that have proved effective in overcoming inequality in access and participation in education, and in ensuring a more equitable distribution of higher levels of learning outcomes. It argues that improvements in both quality and equity can be made at low cost, while also making the case for strengthening levels of domestic and international investments, increasing efficiency in their use and improving the targeting of allocations at the most disadvantaged.

The present report should be read in conjunction with the report of the Secretary-General on current global and national trends and challenges and their impact on education.

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I. Introduction

1. Education for all is a fundamental human right. The right to basic education is built into most national legislation, with some 90 per cent of countries around the world having legally binding regulations requiring children to attend school. Moreover, the right to basic education is an enabling right in that it is a condition for the realization of other economic, social and cultural rights, as well as a catalyst for social change.

2. The positive impacts of education on poverty reduction and overall human development are well documented. They include increased rural productivity and urban self-employment, higher levels of income, lowered fertility, a better diet and earlier and more effective diagnosis of illness, better child health care (in particular through higher levels of female education) and longer life expectancy. The central role of education in the achievement of all Millennium Development Goals is clearly reaffirmed in the outcome document of the High-level Plenary Meeting of the sixty-fifth session of the General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals (Assembly resolution 65/1).

3. The key interlinkages among education, health, poverty reduction and gender equality are well documented. Primary education (Millennium Development Goal 2), for example, has positive effects in terms of health (Goals 4, 5 and 6), poverty reduction and the elimination of hunger (Goal 1), as well as gender equality (Goal 3). In turn, improvements in health, poverty and hunger reduction and gender equality have positive effects on education (see table 1).

Table 1
Positive, reinforcing links between education, health, gender, and poverty and hunger reduction

	Effect on education	*Effect on health*	*Effect on poverty and hunger reduction*	*Effect on gender equality*
Improvement in education	—	Encourages good health practices, delays marriage, reduces fertility and child mortality, improves maternal health; promotes HIV prevention; primary education provides access to secondary and post-secondary education and skilled health workers	Improves agricultural productivity and off-farm employment opportunities; primary education provides access to secondary and post-secondary education and generates skilled workforces	Improves learning and progression for all children
Improvement in health	Increases initial enrolment, daily attendance, progression and learning achievement	—	Increases fitness and productivity and reduces the cost of health care	Improves well-being for women and girls, enabling them to participate fully in society (politically, economically, socially and culturally)

	Effect on education	*Effect on health*	*Effect on poverty and hunger reduction*	*Effect on gender equality*
Improvement in poverty and hunger reduction	Increases initial enrolment, daily attendance, progression and learning achievement	Improves nutrition and creates resources to pay for health care	—	Improves women's health and status, and therefore their capacity to contribute to the establishment of gender-equitable social relations politically, economically, socially and culturally
Improvement in gender equality	Improves relationships developed in schools between girls and boys; effectively teaches social values and creates a safer environment for all children	Improves treatment given to women and men; protects women against health risks associated with gender-based violence; improves care for mothers and newborn children and nutrition of families	Improves nutrition and work opportunities for women and men; ensures that the care economy is adequately supported	—

Source: *The Lancet*, vol. 376, No. 9745 (2010).

4. Higher levels of education outcomes are both a condition for and a result of progress in the achievement of Millennium Development Goals 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6. While it has traditionally been agreed that economic rates of return on the investments of individuals and society in education are highest at the primary level, it can be argued that Goal 2 is an important catalyst for the achievement of other development goals, precisely because it provides access to post-primary levels of education and training that have significant impacts on other dimensions of development.

5. In accelerating progress towards the Millennium Development Goals, it is thus essential to increase the impact of education in achieving a wider range of development goals, by continuing to pursue the broader Dakar Framework for Action on Education for All, adopted in 2000.

II. Trends in achieving international Education for All goals

6. The two education-related Millennium Development Goal targets — 2.A, relative to primary education, and 3.A, relative to gender parity in education — overlap with two of the goals contained within the broader Framework for Action on Education for All. This section provides a brief overview of trends in reaching these Education for All goals.[1]

[1] A more detailed analysis of these trends is contained in the most recent Education for All Global Monitoring Reports of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Early childhood care and education

Education for All goal 1

Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children

Child mortality

7. The cognitive, social and linguistic skills that children acquire in early childhood constitute the foundations for lifelong learning and shape their educational opportunities. The development of such skills is determined by nutrition, health, living conditions and household poverty. An overview of the evolution of child mortality rates — a key indicator of early-childhood care — indicates that, while progress is being made in all regions of the world, extreme disparities exist, with sub-Saharan Africa recording the highest rates, higher than those observed in South and West Asia and approximately three times higher than those observed in the Arab States and Central Asia (see table 2).

Pre-primary education

8. Investment in preschool education is a cost-effective way to overcome possible learning handicaps of early childhood and to enhance learning in primary school, in particular for children from more disadvantaged communities. While there has been a global increase in participation rates in pre-primary education, with enrolment growing in all regions of the world, in particular sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia, the expansion has been uneven. The most recent data indicate that gross enrolment ratios in pre-primary enrolment vary, ranging from 80 per cent in North America and Western Europe to more than 70 per cent in Central and Eastern Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, to between 40 and 50 per cent across Asia, and to less than 20 per cent in the Arab States and sub-Saharan Africa. Likewise, as is often the case at other levels of education, there are significant disparities within countries, with the lowest enrolment ratios observed among the most disadvantaged children. Public investment should be geared towards narrowing disparities by targeting marginalized groups, which tend to reap particularly high benefits from preschool learning.

Table 2
Key indicators for the goal of early childhood care and education

	Under-5 mortality rate		*Gross enrolment ratio: pre-primary education*	
Region	*2005-2010 (per 1,000)*	*Change since 2000-2005 (percentage)*	*2008 (percentage)*	*Change since 1999 (percentage)*
World	71	-8	44	34
Low-income countries	122	-8	18	29
Lower-middle-income countries	70	-9	42	52
Upper-middle-income countries	27	-16	66	31
High-income countries	7	-07	77	7

Region	Under-5 mortality rate		Gross enrolment ratio: pre-primary education	
	2005-2010 (per 1,000)	Change since 2000-2005 (percentage)	2008 (percentage)	Change since 1999 (percentage)
Arab States	50	-13	19	27
Central Asia	52	-9	29	42
East Asia and the Pacific	31	-11	48	27
South and West Asia	82	-10	42	96
Latin America and the Caribbean	28	-14	68	23
North America and Western Europe	6	-6	80	6
Central and Eastern Europe	19	-17	66	34
Sub-Saharan Africa	149	-8	17	43

Source: UNESCO (2011).

9. The levels of education attained by women, in particular in the context of secondary education, have a positive impact on their demand for education for their children. A mother's level of education has a strong positive effect on the enrolment and the levels of education attained by her children, especially if they are girls. For non-literate female adults and out-of-school young people who have missed out on opportunities to gain access to schooling or who have dropped out before having completed the full cycle of primary education, a non-formal education programme can make a major contribution to encouraging the enrolment of their children in preschool education and enhancing the learning outcomes and life chances of those children.

Universal primary education

Education for All goal 2

Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality

Millennium Development Goal target 2.A

Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling

Enrolment

10. The period since 2000 began with rapid progress towards universal primary education. It has been a period during which some of the poorest countries have dramatically increased enrolment, narrowed gender gaps and extended opportunities to disadvantaged groups, with the most rapid rates of increase observed in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and the Arab States[2] (see table 3). The *Millennium*

[2] Significant increases in the primary net enrolment ratio have been observed in such countries as Benin, Bhutan, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Guinea, the United Republic of Tanzania, Mauritania, Morocco, Mozambique, Madagascar, Niger and Yemen.

Development Goals Report 2010 concluded that, despite the tremendous strides made by many poorer countries, the current pace of progress was insufficient to ensure that by 2015 all girls and boys would complete a full course of primary education.

Completion

11. Beyond access and attendance, it is important to ensure that children complete the full cycle of primary education, which is a necessary, albeit sometimes insufficient, condition for the acquisition of sustainable literacy skills.[3] Indeed, despite the global progress in enrolment observed since 2000, millions of children continue to leave school without having completed the full course of the primary education cycle, and are not acquiring basic literacy, numeracy or essential learning tools. School dropout rates remain high. Reasons for dropping out of school include the increased direct and indirect costs of schooling — in particular in the context of the economic and food price crises — as well as the poor quality of education and the fact that it is not considered of great relevance by many individuals, households and communities. Supply factors such as the quality of schooling, the lack of schools and/or distance from school also contribute to school drop-out rates, particularly among girls and adolescents, whose school attendance is further challenged by gender-related health and safety issues.

Table 3
Key indicators for the goal of universal primary education

	Primary adjusted net enrolment ratio[a]		*Survival rate to last grade of primary*	*Out-of-school children*	
Region	*2008 (percentage)*	*Change since 1999 (percentage)*	*2007 (percentage)*	*2008 (thousands)*	*Change since 1999 (percentage)*
World	90	7	93	67 483	-36
Low-income countries	82	28	67	24 838	-42
Lower-middle-income countries	90	6	88	35 846	-36
Upper-middle-income countries	95	1	94	3 740	-15
High-income countries	96	-0.3	98	3 065	3
Arab States	86	11	97	6 188	-34
Central Asia	94	-1	99	322	-11
East Asia and the Pacific	95	1	—	7 869	-27
South and West Asia	90	14	66	17 919	-51
Latin America and the Caribbean	95	1	86	2 946	-21
North America and Western Europe	96	-2	99	2 224	55
Central and Eastern Europe	94	1	97	1 148	-32
Sub-Saharan Africa	77	31	70	28 867	-32

Source: UNESCO (2011).

[a] The primary adjusted net enrolment ratio measures the proportion of children of primary-school age who are enrolled in primary or secondary school.

[3] Completion rates measure the proportion of pupils starting grade 1 who reach the last grade of primary.

Out-of-school children and adolescents

12. Incomplete access to primary education, and dropping out of school at an early age, continue to deny many children the right to basic education. Worldwide progress made in primary enrolment since 2000, however, has reduced the absolute overall number of out-of-school children from an estimated 106 million in 1999 to some 67 million in 2008. Despite that overall progress, the absolute numbers of out-of-school children have actually increased since 1999 in certain regions such as the Caribbean, North America, Western Europe and the Pacific. Overall, the number of out-of-school children worldwide remains high, with close to half of all these children still concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa (32 million) and a quarter in South and West Asia (18 million). In addition, it is estimated that more than a third of out-of-school children live in low-income countries affected by conflict, such as Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Sudan. An estimated 40 million of these children have a disability. Furthermore, girls remain disproportionately represented among those out of school, as do child labourers and children living in slums and rural areas. Marginalized as a result of a combination of factors, these children are the most difficult to reach. Girls also constitute the majority of out-of-school adolescents, in particular in the Arab States, South and West Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

13. High drop-out levels and incomplete primary education are also indications of the inefficient utilization of public and private resources. If retention is to be improved, it is crucial to gain a better understanding of patterns and causes of dropping out, including through the analysis of household-survey data, in order to better design a broad set of policies and strategies to tackle the underlying vulnerabilities.

Youth and adult literacy and skills

> **Education for All goal 3**
>
> Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes
>
> **Education for All goal 4**
>
> Achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults

14. Universal completion of primary education of good quality is thus intimately linked to progress towards Education for All goal 3, on learning and life skills for young people and adults, and goal 4, which aims to improve levels of adult literacy by 2015. The rate of adult literacy increased from 68 per cent to 80 per cent worldwide between the 1985-1994 and 2000-2007 periods, with most rapid progress seen in South and West Asia and the Arab States. However, disparities persist across regions and countries.

Table 4
Youth (15-24) literacy rates
(Percentage)

Region	1985-1994			2005-2008		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Arab States	74	83	65	87	91	84
Central and Eastern Europe	98	99	98	99	99	98
Central Asia	100	100	100	100	100	100
East Asia and the Pacific	95	97	93	98	98	98
East Asia	95	97	93	98	99	98
Pacific	92	93	90	91	91	92
Latin America and the Caribbean	92	92	92	97	97	97
Caribbean	74	77	72	80	80	80
Latin America	92	92	93	98	97	98
North America and Western Europe	100	99	100	100	100	100
South and West Asia	60	72	48	79	86	73
Sub-Saharan Africa	65	72	58	71	76	66
World	83	88	79	89	92	86

Source: UNESCO, Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2011, based on UNESCO Institute for Statistics database.

Note: Data for the periods 1985-1994 and 2005-2008 are the most recent available for the period specified.

15. The level of educational attainment of young adults is a strategic consideration for any discussion on development. An overview of trends over the past two decades clearly shows significant progress in reducing the share of young people who are non-literate, in particular in South and West Asia, as well as in the Arab States, the Caribbean and sub-Saharan Africa (see table 4). Moreover, significant progress can be observed in narrowing the gender gap in youth literacy rates in South and West Asia, sub-Saharan Africa and the Arab States.[4] Despite that progress, the most recent regional data available point to persistent disparities in some regions, with more than one quarter and one fifth of young people, in sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia, respectively, still deprived of basic literacy skills. Significant gender gaps with disadvantaged girls continue to be observed in those regions.

16. Compared with the attention given to primary education, literacy and skills development achieved through technical and vocational education and training have been relatively neglected in most countries. Yet, the broader notion of "basic learning needs" refers specifically to the learning required in order to be able to live and work in dignity. For employers, attention to skills development through technical and vocational education and training is often seen as essential for economic competiveness. Governments and donor agencies tend to combine economic and social priorities, seeing technical and vocational education and training as contributing to economic development and as a means of addressing poverty and marginalization and supporting social cohesion.

[4] One important exception to this pattern is the Caribbean region, where the traditional gender gap is widening, to the disadvantage of young men.

Gender equality in education

Education for All goal 5

Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality

Millennium Development Goal Target 3.A

Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015

Gender parity in primary education

17. Significant progress has been made in reducing gender disparities in education. Gender parity in primary education has already been achieved in many regions: Central and Eastern Europe, Central Asia, East Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, North America and Western Europe.

18. Developing countries as a whole are also approaching gender parity in primary education (see table 5), in particular in South and West Asia, sub-Saharan Africa and the Arab States.

19. Despite those positive strides, girls still constitute the majority of out-of-school children.

Table 5
Gender parity in primary, secondary and tertiary education

	Primary education				*Secondary education*		*Tertiary education*	
	Net enrolment ratio		*Out-of-school children*		*Gross enrolment ratio*		*Gross enrolment ratio*	
	Gender parity index (female/male)		*Percentage female*		*Gender parity index (female/male)*		*Gender parity index (female/male)*	
Region	*1999*	*2008*	*1999*	*2008*	*1999*	*2008*	*1999*	*2007*
Arab States	0.90	0.94	58	58	0.88	0.92	0.74	1.05
Central and Eastern Europe	0.97	0.99	57	50	0.97	0.96	1.18	1.25
Central Asia	0.99	0.98	52	55	0.99	0.98	0.93	1.10
East Asia and the Pacific	1.00	1.02	47	39	0.94	1.04	0.75	1.00
East Asia	1.00	1.02	47	38	0.94	1.04	0.73	0.99
Pacific	0.98	0.97	54	52	1.00	0.96	1.24	1.31
Latin America and the Caribbean	1.00	0.99	46	51	1.07	1.08	1.12	1.19
Caribbean	1.00	1.03	49	48	1.01	1.00	1.30	1.36
Latin America	1.00	0.99	45	52	1.07	1.08	1.12	1.19
North America and Western Europe	1.00	1.01	49	45	1.02	1.00	1.23	1.33
South and West Asia	0.84	0.95	65	59	0.75	0.87	0.64	0.77
Sub-Saharan Africa	0.88	0.95	54	54	0.82	0.79	0.67	0.66
World	0.94	0.98	57	53	0.91	0.96	0.96	1.08

Source: UNESCO, Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2011, based on UNESCO Institute for Statistics database.

Gender parity in secondary and tertiary education

20. Gender parity in secondary education has been achieved in a number of regions, including Central Asia, East Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, North America and Western Europe. In others — South and West Asia and, to a lesser degree, the Arab States — the gender gap has narrowed.

21. Some regions, however, have experienced reversals; notably sub-Saharan Africa and the Pacific. Overall, the gender gap in secondary enrolment is most evident in the three regions (sub-Saharan Africa, Western Asia and South Asia) in which average enrolment is also lowest.

22. With respect to tertiary education, progress has been solid (except in sub-Saharan Africa) and, in some regions, superb. The Arab States, East Asia and the Pacific and South and West Asia have all made significant strides over the past decade. In certain regions (Central and Eastern Europe, the Caribbean, North America, the Pacific and Western Europe), female enrolment in higher education now far outnumbers that of males, a trend that may eventually raise its own set of concerns.

Patterns and scale of inequality and marginalization in education

23. Measuring marginalization in education is often difficult, because it is complicated by a scarcity of national data identifying the most disadvantaged groups. Alarmingly, many Governments have shown little interest in improving such data.

24. Nevertheless, a study of 80 countries conducted in 2010 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) concluded that absolute deprivation in education remained at extraordinarily high levels, despite general progress made in the area of education over the past decade.

25. Further complicating the picture is the fact that national averages often mask more extreme inequalities, linked to poverty, language and gender.

26. When poverty is combined with linguistic and gender differences, the typical result is a powerful cocktail of social exclusion and educational marginalization. Where major gender disparities in education persist, they tend to be aggravated by the traditionally weak position of women and girls in such societies, with sexual harassment and gender-based violence widely tolerated.

27. Conflict-affected countries, which are home to roughly 40 per cent of the world's out-of-school children, are another major locus of education exclusion, as are frequently stigmatized diseases like HIV/AIDS.

28. Thus, major strides made in access to education in certain areas should not invite complacency on other fronts. Governments will have to do far more to extend opportunities to hard-to-reach groups, such as ethnic minorities, poor households in slums and remote rural areas, those affected by armed conflict, and children with disabilities. Success will require carefully designed strategies based on a strong awareness of local patterns of marginalization.

III. Quality of education: improving learning outcomes

> **Education for All goal 6**
>
> Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills

29. Until recently, much of the focus in educational development has been on increasing the number of children and young people who have access to basic education, with much less attention paid to the outcomes of the educational process. The completion of a full cycle of primary education of poor quality does not ensure the acquisition of literacy skills. For example, an analysis of 21 countries in sub-Saharan Africa shows that 22- to 24-year-olds with five years of education had a 40 per cent chance of being illiterate. As a result, patterns of dropping out of primary school and the often low quality of learning in primary schools contribute to illiteracy among young adults.

Gaps in learning achievement across and within countries

30. Beyond disparities in access to and participation in education, significant disparities in the distribution of learning achievement exist among countries. There are also significant inequalities in learning achievement within countries, in particular low-income countries, where they tend to be much wider.

31. While levels of learning achievement may rise with increases in average income levels, the links are far from automatic. A recent study of school improvements in 20 countries confirmed that systems with similar levels of spending on education have widely ranging levels of performance; an increase in expenditure does not always translate into higher or more equitable levels of learning outcomes. Improvements in the quality of education can often be achieved not by increasing levels of funding, but by placing greater emphasis on efficiency and quality.

Enhancing the relevance of learning

32. Enhancing the relevance of learning content is fundamental to improving the effectiveness of education. Improving the quality of education, in particular at the secondary level, hinges largely on making the teaching and learning process more relevant to the world of work. This entails incorporating work experience into the curriculum and examination requirements, and promoting collaboration between schools and vocational and technical training institutions that provide real, on-site training in vocational skills. Examples from a Save the Children project in Colombia include agricultural training on school farms and the development of tourist packages, with students being trained as guides. While better linkages between academic and professional learning are essential for employment, income generation and poverty reduction, enhancing the relevance of learning cannot be reduced to its economic dimension alone. Education, including technical and vocational education and training, has much to contribute to holistic human development outcomes. In today's globalized world, sustainable development also requires specific knowledge, skills and values with which to address a wide range of contemporary challenges

relative to the environment (sustainable management of natural resources, climate change, risk of natural disasters), as well as to social, civic and political socialization in an increasingly interdependent and changing world (respect for life, human dignity, cultural diversity and human rights principles). Such components of global citizenship are essential for enhancing the relevance of education and its catalytic role in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

The teaching and learning process

33. Greater attention needs to be paid to the teaching-learning process through the adoption of student-centred approaches, the design of more relevant curricula that provide life skills and facilitate the transition into the labour market, and the provision of relevant and affordable books and materials. Providing education in the local language for the first years of schooling and addressing such issues as predisposition, temperament, peer pressure and socialization are recommended approaches. Implementing learner-centred approaches remains a challenge in many contexts, since overcrowded classrooms, lack of adequate initial teacher training and lack of professional development opportunities seriously erode the capacity of teachers.

34. Based on comprehensive, multifaceted and locally adapted models, the child-friendly school policy of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has demonstrated that schools can achieve child-centred, safe and healthful learning environments. Information and communications technology, in the context of, inter alia, open educational resources and distance-learning opportunities, offers a number of promising developments for enhancing the quality of and increasing access to education. Moreover, quality teaching and learning programmes need not be expensive, in particular when they are tailored to a specific context and purpose. Not only can affordable and locally available resources be used to create teaching and learning materials; local experts can also be effectively used to teach and share their rich knowledge and experience.

The teacher gap

35. Teachers are the single most important resource for sustaining progress towards an improved quality of learning. One of the main challenges in achieving the Millennium Development Goals and the Education for All goals, in particular with respect to marginalized groups, is the acute shortage of qualified teachers. In order to accelerate progress towards universal primary education, countries will have to make significant efforts to recruit and train teachers. Many countries are facing severe teacher shortages. Furthermore, countries that have achieved universal primary education continue to face challenges in recruiting, training and retaining sufficient numbers of qualified primary teachers. In 2008, nearly 100 countries, including both developing and developed nations, faced teacher shortages to some degree in their efforts to provide quality education to all primary-school-aged children by the target year of 2015. At least 1.9 million additional new teachers might be needed in order to achieve Millennium Development Goal 2 by 2015. Given the attrition of an estimated 7.2 million teachers between 2008 and 2015,[5] a total of 9.1 million teachers would need to be recruited worldwide to ensure the

[5] Teacher attrition is due to retirement, change in profession or teaching level, or the assumption of non-teaching educational responsibilities.

achievement of Goal 2 by 2015. It is estimated that the number of new teachers needed in sub-Saharan Africa alone equals the current teaching force in the region. In addition, it is estimated that HIV and AIDS account for up to 77 per cent of the teacher shortages in countries with high HIV rates.

Inequitable patterns of teacher deployment

36. The shortage of qualified teachers is also related to patterns of deployment. High pupil-teacher ratios tend to be concentrated in rural areas, as well as in areas marked by poverty and marginalization. Moreover, these inequitable patterns of teacher deployment are exacerbated by the limited number of qualified teachers. Low teacher morale further aggravates the problem, and low pay hinders the recruitment of promising candidates, forcing many teachers to supplement their salaries through other activities. While teacher absenteeism may be due to low remuneration, it is also related to a lack of other incentives and professional development opportunities, especially in rural areas. The financial challenge of expanding the teaching force and ensuring its training and professional development has led some countries to resort to hiring teachers at lower levels of remuneration and to provide them with fewer benefits, possibly compromising the quality of the teaching and learning processes.

IV. Overcoming barriers to universal basic education for all

37. When education goals are aligned with the right to education, measures to make education more affordable and accessible, social protection programmes more comprehensive and learning environments more inclusive all contribute to progress in terms of access to, equity in and quality of education.

Making education more affordable for poorer households

38. In fulfilling their legal obligation to provide free primary education for all, a number of States have reduced or eliminated the direct costs of primary schooling through the partial or total abolition of school fees. The school fee abolition initiative, initially launched by UNICEF and the World Bank, was designed to support policies to ensure access to quality basic education by removing or reducing cost barriers for parents and households. The initiative has accelerated progress towards universal completion of primary education through the elimination of school fees or the provision of targeted fee exemptions, subsidies and incentives for the poor, resulting in dramatic surges in enrolment in such countries as Burundi, Kenya, Timor-Leste and Uganda. In particular, a tremendous increase in enrolment has been observed among poor, previously excluded and vulnerable children (girls, children living in remote rural areas, child labourers, children with disabilities and children affected by HIV/AIDS and social conflict), whose households are most affected by school fees. School-fee abolition has a direct impact on equity and inclusion, as it addresses the rights and specific needs of marginalized, excluded and vulnerable children.

39. The total abolition of school fees is only a partial response to the poverty constraints affecting household demand for education. It is important to consider complementary measures to address the indirect opportunity costs of schooling. Such measures may involve cutting the costs of uniforms, textbooks and other

materials, as well as offering conditional cash transfers and stipends at the secondary level. For example, Nepal has scaled up its stipend programme, Viet Nam has introduced a variety of financial support mechanisms to help ethnic minority students, and Mozambique has targeted orphans and other vulnerable children with vouchers for the purchase of clothing and stationery. In addition, Turkey introduced conditional cash transfers in 2002, targeting regular school attendance in primary and secondary schools among children from poor households, while Armenia, through its food-for-education programme, has increased incentives for participation and more regular attendance through the provision of school meals.

Making schools more accessible for children and adolescents

40. Physical access to schools and classrooms remains an important barrier to the achievement of the goals of Education for All, in particular in relation to girls in rural areas, isolated communities in more remote areas and migrant populations. There are many successful examples of measures to reduce distances to school or to adapt schooling to the specific living conditions in local communities.

Box 1
Reaching the marginalized in Bangladesh through floating schools

Bangladesh has made rapid but uneven progress towards universal primary education. Once-deep gender inequalities have been eliminated in primary education, and rural areas have been catching up with urban areas in this regard. Enrolment among children living in extreme poverty has been less impressive, however, and the marginalization of this group remains a barrier to universal primary education. Initiatives developed by non-governmental organizations, reaching more than 1 million of the country's most marginalized children, provide powerful evidence that this barrier can be removed.

Another example comes from the country's riverbanks. The 800,000-strong bede, or river gypsy, community lives on boats in groups of 10 to 15 families. The bedes, who are among the poorest people in the country, travel long distances, are not permanently settled and have traditionally lacked the residency rights necessary to claim places in school. Their mobility makes it difficult for children to attend school regularly, so teachers are reluctant to enrol them or to provide them with books.

Since 2006, a national non-governmental organization, the Grambangla Unnayan Committee, has provided education through 21 "school boats" that follow the bede community. Teachers are recruited from the community and are given basic training. The boats provide education for two to three years, after which children living with sedentary relatives can gain admission to Government primary schools.

41. In Bangladesh, non-governmental organizations have launched initiatives to make education more accessible for children who continue to miss out on educational opportunities because of extreme poverty and/or the mobility that

characterizes the lifestyles of their communities (see box 1). The student family lodging programme launched by the People's Foundation of Bolivia has made education more accessible for young people from extremely poor families living in isolated small communities in the Andean highlands. Funded by municipal districts, educational centres in strategically located villages, together with an accommodation network of host families, enable young people in neighbouring communities to attend school on a regular basis and to take part in preventive health seminars during the week, returning to their families and communities at the end of the week. School accessibility is also enhanced by the provision of low-cost ramps, appropriate toilet facilities and transport for children with disabilities, barriers that can be overcome through policy interventions and regulations relating to school design.

Providing second-chance programmes for out-of-school children and young people

42. Accelerated learning programmes are another option for addressing the education needs of children and young people who have never enrolled in school or have dropped out before completing the full primary cycle, or whose education has been disrupted by displacement as a result of a conflict or natural disaster. In the disadvantaged regions of northern Ghana, for example, second-chance accelerated literacy programmes conducted by non-governmental organizations have provided out-of-school children with effective basic skills and, in many instances, the opportunity to re-enter a formal school curriculum (see box 2).

Box 2
Addressing educational deprivation in northern Ghana

Northern Ghana faces some of the country's most acute educational deprivation. School attendance rates there are among the lowest in the country, and many children reach adulthood with no more than a few years of schooling. Parents cite distance to school, cost, seasonal labour demand and (for girls) early marriage as major barriers.

An innovative programme run by non-governmental organizations is aimed at providing out-of-school children in northern Ghana with a second chance. School for Life offers an intensive nine-month literacy course for children aged 8 to 14, with the objective of preparing them to re-enter primary school. Teaching schedules are designed to accommodate seasonal demands on children's time. Students are given free books and uniforms are not required, reducing the cost of attendance.

The School for Life curriculum is designed to make education meaningful for rural families who believe that formal schools fail to respect the dignity and strengthen the self-esteem of their children. Students are taught in local languages by locally recruited facilitators — many of them volunteers — who receive in-service training.

School for Life has achieved impressive results. Between 1996 and 2007, it reached some 85,000 children in eight districts, with no discernible gender gap. An evaluation in 2007 found that more than 90 per cent of participating students had completed the course and that 81 per cent of course graduates met third-grade literacy and numeracy standards and 65 per cent had entered the formal education system. Government data indicate that School for Life graduates entering formal school perform above average in mathematics and English.

43. In conflict-affected countries, where there is a high concentration of out-of-school children and young people, accelerated learning enables older students to complete their basic education cycle in a timely manner, providing them with basic literacy and life skills. Examples of such programmes include those being provided by the Ministry of Education of the Sudan to help students in Darfur to catch up with their schooling and the Complementary Rapid Education for Primary School Programme for adolescents affected by the conflict in Sierra Leone, being provided by the Ministry of Education of Sierra Leone and UNICEF (see box 3).

Box 3
Complementary Rapid Education for Primary School Programme in Sierra Leone

In the wake of 11 years of civil war, a high number of the adolescents of Sierra Leone lag behind, as they were either affected by or involved in the war, deprived of access to basic education opportunities. It is estimated that more than 400,000 children aged 10 to 15 have missed part of their schooling or have never been to school. The current youth unemployment rate stands at 70 per cent.

One impressive programme aimed at reversing this situation is the Ibis Complementary Rapid Education for Primary School Programme, developed by UNICEF and the Sierra Leone Ministry of Education. The programme offers six years' worth of primary school education in three years to children and adolescents who missed education as a result of the war. More than 3,000 young people have benefited from the Programme, which also works rigorously to enhance accountability in the delivery of education and the professional development of teachers and education stakeholders at both the central and district levels. The Programme trains teachers while putting them to work in classrooms.

44. Skills development through technical and vocational education and training for the world of work can play an important role in the rehabilitation and socio-economic integration of former combatants.

Overcoming resource constraints for teachers

45. Although the shortage of financial resources is a key constraint on efforts to improve the training and the working conditions of teachers in both developed and developing countries, it is not insurmountable. Effective strategies exist for mitigating the potential adverse impact of limited resources on the training and working conditions of teachers. Foremost among these is the improved better management of available resources. Arguably, the poor management of resources is a more critical constraint. A focus on non-financial incentives such as providing adequate professional support for teachers, promoting innovative approaches, new skills and motivation, easing bureaucratic burdens and instituting accountability measures can improve teacher training and working conditions, even in resource-poor contexts.

46. Moreover, when it is decentralized, teacher professional support can be made more affordable, more sustainable and more contextually responsive, in particular in remote areas. Effective experiences include building the capacity of decentralized education authorities to deliver professional support to teachers and developing teacher support networks that are led and coordinated by competent teachers and serve as spaces for, inter alia, research and the sharing of experiences. In addition, the awarding of diplomas to teachers who participate in such decentralized professional support services can be an important incentive. Information and communications technology can be used to scale up teacher training programmes through distance education, which can be delivered in such a way as to ensure that farmers receive information about markets and products from information technology kiosks.

47. There are effective measures to reduce inequalities in terms of educational access, participation and outcomes. Various combinations of measures are aimed at making education more affordable for the poorest communities, more accessible to the most disadvantaged learners, better adapted to local contexts and conditions, and more equitable in terms of quality of learning. While some of these measures require greater public funding, many do not.

V. Mobilizing resources for education

48. Domestic resources — both public and private — are the primary source of funding for education, which is usually the second largest budget item, after defence. Globally, slightly more national income is spent today on education than was spent a decade ago, albeit with great differences existing among countries. Economic growth rates, levels of revenue collection and political priorities are primary factors driving education spending. Resource allocation involves many hard choices, which are complicated by the long-term nature of education "returns". Yet, before resources can be allocated, they must be mobilized. This remains a major challenge for many countries seeking to expand access and improve learning outcomes.

49. The recent global financial and economic crises have further complicated the picture, worsening already strained public finances and an already bleak outlook. At the same time, household demand for education appears to have weakened in certain developing countries as a result of falling incomes and mounting education costs. In such places, absenteeism, dropouts and child labour appear to be on the rise.

50. Even before the recent crises, and despite an overall upward trend, underinvestment in education in developing countries was a widespread concern. Changing this will require that the "fiscal space" for education spending be expanded by, inter alia: (a) promoting cost-recovery measures (especially for higher education and technical and vocational education and training programmes); (b) encouraging greater private sector involvement; (c) managing existing resources more efficiently; and (d) boosting aid and other potential resources, such as remittances and philanthropy. In addition, policymakers should focus initially on expanding the overall revenue base by increasing efficiency in terms of collection and accounting.

Foreign aid for education

51. After having gradually increased by more than a third since 2002 and having remained stable as a share of official development assistance, aid for education stagnated in 2008. Three key challenges in this area are: a narrow base of major donors; a growing emphasis on higher education, as opposed to basic education; and a widening financing gap.

52. Cuts in aid to basic education have been particularly severe, jeopardizing past gains. Of all regions, Africa faces the greatest shortfall, requiring an estimated $18 billion a year to meet the education development goals by 2015. Furthermore, aid allocations should be distributed more evenly among countries.

Traditional and innovative sources of funding

53. Aid shortfalls need not derail education efforts, however. National resources devoted to education spending far outweigh aid-financed education spending nearly everywhere. Time-tested strategies such as improving the efficiency of education spending, tackling corruption and cutting back on spending in other areas (military/security outlays, for example) would make existing resources go further.

54. The private sector and foundations can also make a major contribution. The private sector can help to raise the visibility of the education sector as a critical input for economic competitiveness and can assist in identifying needs for emerging skills, in developing standards and in evaluating the effectiveness of programmes aimed at meeting the needs of the labour market. Today, the potential of the private sector and foundations to raise funds for education remains very much underutilized, especially compared with the major successes achieved for the health sector.[6] The first estimate of corporate contributions to education in developing countries suggests that companies based in the United States of America contribute nearly half a billion dollars to education in developing countries each year, as compared with $7 billion directed to the health sector. However, corporate contributions tend to be small and divided among many non-profit projects, with short-term grant cycles of one to three years. In addition, most contributions of corporations are not coordinated with any other actor, including the Governments of developing countries or other donors. There is a need for more data about how global companies support education in developing countries, and for donor education to increase the effectiveness of private-sector financing of education.[7]

[6] Marten and Witte, "'New' philanthropy and international development", *Alliance* magazine, September 2008.

[7] Van Fleet "A global education challenge: harnessing corporate philanthropy to educate the world's poor" (Washington, D.C., Brookings Institution, 2011).

55. Furthermore, various innovative, non-traditional funding sources have been suggested for the improvement of national finances. One example is the idea of offering policy and other incentives to lure more of the informal sector (a large component of economic activity in many developing countries) into the formal economy. Other proposals include an education tax on financial transactions, levies on the salaries of professional athletes and education "venture funds".

Education for All Fast Track Initiative

56. Launched in 2002 to scale up progress on education, the Education for All Fast Track Initiative has since produced mixed results. One study found that gains had been slowed by troubles related to governance, fledgling-donor support and a limited range of fund disbursement, especially among conflict-affected countries. However, the study also found that the Initiative's positive impact was reflected in better coordinated national education policies and the emergence of a "catalytic fund" to provide additional support.

Better partnerships for education

57. Leveraging education funding will require greater engagement across all sectors of society and among a wider range of stakeholders, from parents, teachers and local school boards to national policymakers, investors, non-governmental organizations, donor Governments and international institutions.

58. Crisis or no crisis, domestic resource flows will continue to serve as the financial backbone of education spending. Moreover, the spread of sound macroeconomic policy (promoting low inflation and low debt) will ensure that such flows are predictable, sustained and growing, which is crucial to achieving the goals of Education for All.

Box 4
Regional meetings

Four regional meetings were held in support of the preparations for the 2011 annual ministerial review of the Economic and Social Council, bringing together a diverse group of stakeholders: Governments, civil society, institutions of the United Nations system and the private sector. While education challenges were approached from various local and regional perspectives, the goals of expanding access and improving education quality were shared by all participants.

Doha was the site of the regional meeting for Western Asia, themed "Innovative approaches to reaching women, girls and the marginalized in the Arab region" and held on 9 December 2010. Issues discussed included: (a) improving the educational attainment of marginalized groups, in particular women; (b) concern about poor education results in certain Arab countries, despite relatively high levels of spending; and (c) the link between education and the region's high youth unemployment rates.

Chonburi, Thailand, played host to the regional meeting for Asia and the Pacific, themed "Education as key to achieving all Millennium Development Goals: prospects and challenges in the Asia-Pacific region" and held on 24 March 2011. Issues discussed included: (a) the large interregional disparities in terms of access and quality; (b) factors behind interregional differences in recent rates of education progress; and (c) education's positive influence on other development indicators.

The regional meeting for Africa, themed "The right to Education for All in Africa: reinforcing quality and equity", was held in Lomé, on 12 April 2011. Issues discussed included: (a) expanding the use of rights-based approaches to improve education results; (b) regional progress to date on education; and (c) ways to scale up efforts towards remaining goals.

A fourth regional meeting, for Latin America and the Caribbean, will be held in Buenos Aires, Argentina, on 12 and 13 May 2011 and will have the theme "Key education challenges in Latin America and the Caribbean: teachers, quality and equity". Among other things, the meeting will (a) assess regional progress towards the Education for All goals; (b) highlight major obstacles to continued progress; and (c) explore various strategies for overcoming those obstacles.

VI. The way forward and recommendations

An integrated and holistic approach to development

59. **The Millennium Development Goals remain a powerful means of keeping the world's attention on development issues. In addition to being an important goal in its own right, education is widely recognized as a catalyst for the achievement of all other development goals. Increased levels of educational outcomes are shown to be intrinsically linked to long-term poverty reduction efforts, the improvement of health and the promotion of greater gender equity. Moreover, the important role of education in promoting the transition towards more sustainable patterns of consumption and production is now widely accepted. Given the clear linkages between education and other development goals, as well as the catalytic role that education can play, national development efforts need to be pursued in an integrated and holistic manner. Education must be mainstreamed into the design and implementation of integrated development strategies and the acceleration of national development efforts.**

Policy coherence: aligning actions across sectors

60. **Progress in improving education depends not only on policies and actions implemented by the education sector or national education authorities, but also on those carried out in a wide range of other sectors. The achievement of international education development goals therefore requires a coherent and comprehensive set of policies implemented in a wide range of sectors.**

61. As a result of these linkages, there is a need for governments to align actions across sectors with a view to ensuring the overall coherence of sectoral policies so as to maximize synergies and the impact of education within integrated development interventions.

Strengthening coordination and cooperation among Education for All convening agencies

62. United Nations agencies must ensure that their programmes of support for national education development efforts are made more coherent by adopting a broader view of education. Likewise, they must ensure that their education programmes are coherent with one another, as well as with broader national development goals.

63. While attempts have been made to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the five convening agencies of the Education for All movement (the United Nations Development Programme, UNESCO, the United Nations Population Fund, UNICEF and the World Bank), sustained improvement is needed in this area, in particular with regard to enhancing cooperation at the country level and building on each agency's comparative advantage and field presence. This is now recognized by the leadership of the agencies, as illustrated in the recently created task force to consider the Education for All agenda beyond 2015.

64. The five convening agencies should provide stronger leadership for Education for All and strengthen their collaboration, including through a shared understanding of their respective roles and responsibilities, at the global, regional and national levels.

Going beyond universal primary education: adopting a broader vision of education for development

65. As the broader Education for All agenda is pursued, the international community must also look more closely at the issue of access to secondary education and entry into the world of "decent" work. Evidence shows that the availability of quality secondary education is a key determinant of the completion of the primary school cycle, because secondary education is associated with economic benefits greater than those associated with primary education. It is important to promote vocational training initiatives and informal and low-threshold types of training, notably for marginalized groups of young people. While primary and other components of basic education remain a priority, the direct contribution of secondary education and skills development, in particular for young women, to the achievement of the other Millennium Development Goals needs to be recognized and planned for.

Increased spending on education

66. In order to maintain progress towards expanded and more equitable access to better-quality basic education, countries with below-average educational performance should increase their overall investment in education. The global financial crisis should not be used to justify decreased Government spending for the education sector. It is now widely accepted by the international community that no less than 6 per cent of a country's national income should

be devoted to education and that 15 to 20 per cent of a Government's budget should be dedicated to primary education.

67. While national funding remains the main source of progress towards education development goals, international financing continues to be an important supplementary source, in particular for low-income countries. It is important that donors live up to the commitments made in 2005, when they pledged to increase overall development aid from $80 billion to $130 billion by 2010. Moreover, donors should attach more weight to education, in particular basic education, as part of their overall development aid.

Enhanced efficiency through greater accountability and transparency

68. Higher levels of education spending alone do not suffice; ensuring that available resources are used more efficiently and allocated more equitably is just as important. Evidence from developing countries shows that strong political will is a key determinant of success in improving educational attainment, quality and equity and is, arguably, more important — at least in some contexts — than the volume of the financial resources devoted to education. There is a need for greater accountability and transparency in the delivery of education services. Improving accountability and governance by putting in place the appropriate incentives can help improve the functioning of key institutions, as they can help enhance the involvement of teachers and local officials in decision-making processes, improve resource allocation, plug resource leakages, ensure that resources reach schools, and improve human resources management.

Focus on equity through inclusive policies and targeted interventions

69. The allocation of public resources for education should serve to reduce inequities, in particular through affirmative action geared towards disadvantaged communities. If the expansion of the provision of education is to be equity-based, it must be supplemented by targeted interventions to reach marginalized groups. As part of a pro-equity approach, it may be necessary to go beyond the provision of free primary education by expanding the coverage of social protection measures and cash transfer programmes that use school enrolment and attendance as conditions for payments to households. Governments should implement inclusive policies and create programmes to better reach target groups, based on the information on marginalized populations. Such policies should include the elimination of school fees, the reduction of indirect costs associated with uniforms and textbooks, the provision of education opportunities that are closer to marginalized communities, the conduct of accelerated learning programmes for out-of-school children and young people in difficult circumstances, and the expansion of access to early-childhood care and education services.

Enhancing capacity for more effective strategic planning and implementation

70. One way of strengthening political commitment to education is through the enhancement of capacity for strategic planning and implementation. Important foundations for such strategic management of education and training are established through strengthened management and information

systems, increased relevance and availability of education indicators, improved data collection, analysis and application, and reinforced monitoring and evaluation systems. The enhancement of national capacities for strategic planning would also strengthen national ownership of international aid for education and ensure greater alignment with national development priorities. There is a critical need to further strengthen national capacities in the fields of data collection, monitoring and evaluation.

71. Planning for the provision of education and training services needs to focus more intensely than in the past on those specific characteristics of particularly marginalized groups that make service provision more difficult and limit the ability of these groups to take advantage of what is available. Despite the progress achieved in many contexts, not enough disaggregated data are available, with the result that learning outcomes cannot be sufficiently monitored. It is critical that household survey data be used with a view to the identification of patterns and causes of dropping out of school and the design of more targeted strategies for the most vulnerable children and young people.

Improving the working conditions and training of teachers

72. Teachers constitute the most important educational resource in all countries and all communities. It is thus essential that their conditions of work and their training be improved. Experience from across the world indicates that in each context, measures can be taken to improve the conditions of work and the training of teachers. Such measures include: constructively engaging teacher unions and parent-teacher associations in order to improve teacher working conditions and implement the teacher code of conduct; improving revenue collection through taxes and allocating some of those resources towards the improvement of teacher training and working conditions; setting common standards for teacher training colleges; appointing independent bodies involving public, private and civil society actors to ensure the quality assurance of teacher training institutions; appointing committed and strategic leaders to head education systems and teacher training colleges; recruiting teachers from local communities to improve motivation and reduce absenteeism; and reducing the burden of non-teaching administrative tasks such as census enumeration, election duty and other tasks. Such measures would allow teachers to have time for additional contact with learners. To ensure a comprehensive teacher policy, greater efforts should be invested in the training, retraining and retention of teachers and the improvement of their working conditions. Teachers who have regular contact with excluded families and with parents of pupils experiencing difficulty should be given special training, support and incentives. They should also be included in the development of education policies.

Improving the quality and relevance of learning

73. The relevance of learning outcomes to the multiple dimensions of societal development in specific contexts is of paramount importance if any effort is to improve the quality of education. Improving the quality and relevance of learners' experience, in turn, raises the perceived value of education among learners, their families and their communities. The development of national quality standards for different stages of education and for various types of the provision of education can allow for enhanced learning through greater

involvement by stakeholders at the local level, greater autonomy in school management, and more inclusive teaching and learning processes adapted to the needs of learners and their communities in their specific contexts. Moreover, the improvement of partnerships between schools and homes in the promotion of learning by children and young people is greatly enhanced when home and school experiences are bridged by using the mother tongue as a medium of teaching and learning, at least at the initial stages. Mother-tongue instruction greatly enhances the immediate relevance of the educational experience and facilitates the acquisition of literacy and basic learning skills.

74. For too long, assessments of learning achievement have focused narrowly on measurable cognitive skills, through the administration of large-scale national, regional and/or international tests. Attention needs to be paid to the inclusion of both locally relevant and universal values and attitudes in the assessment of learning outcomes. Improving the relevance of teaching and learning also requires the periodic review and development of curricula, for which specific budgetary allocations must be made. The implementation of new content and methods requires national/regional mechanisms that plan and coordinate the various dimensions of the updating of curricula within a system-wide approach (the design of teaching/learning materials, pre-service and in-service teacher training, learning assessment, research/evaluation and monitoring).